

The Bermuda Public School System Deserves Better

"Parents, teachers, and students deserve clarity, stability, and honesty about the future of our schools. Instead, they have been met with years of confusion, shifting plans, and decisions made without proper consultation or transparency. Bermudians feel this instability every day and our children are the ones paying the price."

This coming from Shadow Education Minister, Ben Smith, after learning parents at Francis Patton Primary that the Bermuda Public School System will be returning to a three-tier system - under a different name.

"The Minister cannot repackage a middle school as 'Year 7-8' and pretend it is reform. Families can see clearly what is happening. The Government is trying to present these changes as minor adjustments, but the reality is very different. That is a three-tier system, despite the Government spending years and millions of dollars telling the country it was delivering a two-tier structure. We are now seeing the consequences of rolling out reform without a complete, fully costed, fully resourced implementation plan.

"What happened at Francis Patton Primary is extremely concerning. If the principal was told the school will not receive the building investment previously promised and therefore cannot accommodate Y7-Y8, then the school has been backed into a corner. That is not a partnership. That is not consultation. That is not strategic planning. This is precisely why I have been calling for the Government to publish the full reform audit, the full school closure impact report, the full assessment and support capacity report, and a quarterly public scorecard so parents and teachers can understand what is actually happening. Instead, schools are scrambling because the Government is changing direction without giving the data, the resources, or the support needed to make any version of the plan work."

We have to remember that the children now in the middle of this restructuring are the same children who lived through the learning loss of Covid, the social and emotional disruptions of isolation, inconsistent support services, and the continuing instability of a reform process that keeps changing course.

Mr Smith adds there has been constant uncertainty for students which has had a negative effect in and outside of classrooms: "Pupils have had to ponder, 'What school they will I be attending? What school am I going to? Will my teacher still be there? Is my building still open?' What toll is this taking on our students' development?

"Teachers are seeing higher anxiety, behavioural challenges, and gaps in foundational skills. Parents are worried. And our student support systems are already stretched. While the chaos of underdeveloped plans continues we still have day to day pressing issues.

Assessment delays remain significant, specialist support remains insufficient and follow-up after assessment is inconsistent, delayed or non-existent."

He says it's important to hear from public school teachers.

"We need to hear the voices of the teachers that are dealing with this day-to-day impact but of course their hands are tied and voices muted. Without transparency, we cannot say confidently that children are being supported and that is a failure of leadership. This reform did not belong to one Minister and it did not belong to one department. It belonged to the Cabinet and the entire PLP Government, who gave it political backing for eight years.

"They spent millions on architects and consultants saw the Minister travel to Asia, closed schools without full plans in place, reversed decisions under political pressure in the East and West, and pushed ahead despite warning signs from teachers, principals, and parents. After all of that, they are now reversing one of the core promises of the reform. Bermuda deserves to know how did this happen? What went wrong in planning and execution? Who is responsible for the waste, the confusion, and the instability? Right now, the Government appears more focused on messaging than accountability but the public can see the reality in their schools and they deserve answers. This is exactly why I have said repeatedly that we need the Independent Education Authority up and running. We cannot continue with political promises that shift every election cycle. We cannot continue with children and teachers being asked to adapt to confusion created at the top. We cannot continue treating public school students as the testing ground for unstable policy. Right now, the Government has created chaos at the very moment Bermuda needs stability, support, and clear direction for our young people."

Mr Smith concludes: "My focus is and will remain on the students. They get one chance at their education. They cannot continue to be caught in the middle of political indecision and policy reversal. The Government must immediately provide the support teachers and students need. They must openly communicate the progress made to date. And if changes are required, they must outline those changes clearly and transparently. An independent audit of the reform must be completed. An independent body must chart the path forward and any future plan must prioritise stability and student wellbeing not more disruption.

"The whole purpose of changing the tier system was to reduce transitions for students because transitions disrupt learning and development. Yet this Government has created even more transitions, more uncertainty, and more instability. Our children deserve better and Bermuda deserves the truth."

Ben Smith, the Shadow Minister of Education